

## History of the Mercer Clinic Holiday Pet Baskets

A group of volunteers at the [UCD Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital \(VMTH\)](#) has carried on a tradition of making holiday pet "baskets" for the Mercer Vet Clinic for the Homeless since 1995. The pet basket tradition stemmed from a VMTH staff newsletter meeting (The VOICE) where the group was trying to decide how they could go about having a holiday charity project. After brainstorming a while, [Marcia Nelson](#) and [Becky Griffey](#) came up with the great idea of making holiday pet baskets for the pets of the homeless through the Mercer Veterinary Clinic associated with the UC Davis Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

Historically, the Mercer Veterinary Clinic was started by vet students [Randy Singer](#) and [Dori Borjesson](#), in 1992 which was modeled on a Seattle free pet clinic at the time. The Mercer Veterinary Clinic offers free veterinary care monthly, for the pets of the homeless and is operated by volunteer veterinary faculty, residents and students from the UC Davis Veterinary School and relies entirely on donations. The Clinic is held the second Saturday of every month at the [Loaves and Fishes complex](#) at 1321 West "C" St. in Sacramento and scheduled between 8:00 am, and 3:00 pm. Veterinary faculty who volunteer regularly include: [Dr. Laurel Gershwin](#), [Dr. Tom Kendall](#), [Dr. Molly May](#), [Dr. Mike Teglass](#), and [Dr. Jill Gallo](#). The need for this program to continue was evident to all of us who saw the photos of the first event where the delighted pet owners and their pets, apparently, had a great time. It was clear that these very special pets were more like family, than a pet, to their loving owners. Our group was moved and motivated to make this an annual event. Although these less fortunate folks did not have the means to give gifts to their beloved pets, we could help by continuing to organize this event annually and making the holidays a little brighter for them. This year the Holiday Pet Basket distribution will be at the December Mercer Clinic on the second Saturday in December starting at 8:00 am until approximately 1:00 pm.

The former members of the VMTH newsletter committee who still participate annually include [Becky Griffey](#) and [Eileen Samitz](#). Becky Griffey was the coordinator for the first four years and Eileen Samitz has been the coordinator for the last ten years. These pet basket "elves" are joined by other helpers, including [Marion Derby](#), [Stacey Peters Zindel](#) and her daughter [Hannah Judy Wall](#), [Marcia Reemts](#), [Monica Kratochvil](#), [Diane Nayden](#), [Marty Ynostroza](#), and [Matt Nichols](#).

Lynn and Laura Christianson of PDQ in Davis are kind enough to help us acquire the perfect box sizes needed for the pet basket event. We are very grateful every year to [Dawn Cauthen](#) of the VMTH Nutrition Service for handling the ordering and the important delivery timing of getting over 500 pounds of pet food to us in time to put in the holiday pet baskets. [Pat Bailey](#) and [Lynn Narlesky](#) of the vet schools Dean's Office, for helping us coordinate with the media to share with this event with the public.

We also have veterinary student "elves" annually who are regular volunteers at the monthly Mercer Pet Clinic for the Homeless. Most of the student volunteers also serve as Mercer Officers to help coordinate the clinic.

Traditionally, the VMTH newsletter staff wrap the pet "baskets" (open empty boxes) with holiday wrapping prior to the noontime "Holiday Pet Basket Stuffing" gathering. In the first year, the holiday pet basket event produced 25 baskets. In subsequent years, the number increased to 40, then 75, 90, 100, 110, 120 and eventually 130. This past year we made 130 baskets due to the growing need. The pet "baskets" are sorted for dogs or cats, labeled accordingly, then filled with a variety of gifts such as food, treats, grooming and skin care items, leashes, and of course, toys for the pets

The ability to provide the Mercer Vet Clinic Holiday pet baskets relies entirely on the generosity of donations from animal lovers who wish to help these needy pets, and pet supply companies who are kind enough to donate as well. This year appeared to an especially difficult year for donations due to hard economic times nationwide. However, we were fortunate enough to get donations from most companies and due to word traveling throughout the VMTH. Our terrific VMTH staff, in addition to others pet lovers outside of the VMTH who heard about our need, responded immediately with their kind donations of money and pet items for our cause. The staff of VMTH is known for their love of animals, reflected on a daily basis by their dedication to help and heal the animals that come to the VMTH. Once again, they demonstrated their commitment to caring for animals, by helping the pets of the homeless this year.

One of the rewards of participating in the Holiday Pet Basket distribution include wonderful experiences like the year we met “Beethoven” and his loving owner, Ruby. Ruby referred to the fluffy, playful lab-mixed breed dog as her “son” who would always follow her closely. We got to see him prancing and dancing due to all of the excitement of the pet basket distribution awaiting his goodies and treats. Ruby explained how much Beethoven meant to her, that he was family to her since his enthusiastic companionship provided her with a smile everyday. He also helped to keep her warm in the cold evenings, as well as protected her and guarded her from other dangers. She went on to tell of Beethoven’s heroic act when he awakened her one night after her sleeve caught fire while she slept too near a fire, saving her from serious injury or worse. She had always been grateful to him for this and other protective acts that he has performed since he was a pup, only a few years ago. He, too, was clearly grateful to her for saving him from drowning when he was thrown into the Sacramento River by someone in a gunnysack. Seeing these two very special companions together, Ruby’s smiling face and Beethoven’s wagging tail, while she opened up his gifts from Santa was heartwarming to all of us. You can see for yourself in the photo we took of them and why experiences like this help keep us motivated to reach out to contributors, who we count on, to help us make this event happen annually.

As one might imagine, in order to produce 130 baskets filled with gifts, it takes many people helping and contributing to make it a success. Thanks to all the above participants and listed donors, we had the ingredients to produce the biggest and best holiday pet basket event ever. However, we wish to remind everyone that every year we rely on the kindness of others to help these very special pets, who are more than a pet. Instead, they are the constant companions and family members to the less fortunate. Please help keep this wonderful tradition alive by contributing any time of year to the Mercer Clinic Holiday Pet Baskets.

To have a tour of photos to see what Mercer Vet Clinic for the Pets of the Homeless and the Holiday Pet Basket Programs are about please see our Mercer Clinic “Photo Gallery” at: [http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercer/photo\\_gallery.cfm](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercer/photo_gallery.cfm).

**To donate items or to make a financial donation (which is tax deductible) for the Holiday Pet Baskets and the Mercer Vet Clinic for the Pets of the Homeless we accept contributions all year round.** For items to be donated please e-mail Eileen Samitz at [emsamitz@ucdavis.edu](mailto:emsamitz@ucdavis.edu) or call (530) 756-5165. Monetary donations help us the most in order to purchase the many items that we need for the baskets and to supply the clinic with needed medications, supplies, diagnostic services and surgical medical care for the patients.

To make a financial donation to the Mercer Clinic and the Holiday Pet Baskets please make your check to: **UC Regents - Mercer Veterinary Clinic Holiday Pet Baskets** and send it to: UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, Office of the Dean, P.O. Box 1167, Davis, CA 95617-

1167 Attn: **Mercer Holiday Pet Baskets**. See our website on the holiday pet baskets at: [http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercerc/donation\\_holiday/index.cfm](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercerc/donation_holiday/index.cfm).

For anyone who wishes to make a financial **donation to the Mercer Veterinary Clinic for the Pets of the Homeless (which is tax deductible)** or to donate pet items **any time of the year**, please e-mail [info@mercercclinic.org](mailto:info@mercercclinic.org) or leave a message at (530) 752-1143.

To send a monetary donation (which is tax deductible) for the year round monthly clinic, please make your check to: **Mercer Vet Clinic** and mail it to: Mercer Veterinary Clinic for the Pets of the Homeless, P.O. Box 297, Davis CA, 95617. You may also donate through PayPal by following this link: <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercerc/donation>. You will find more information about the year round services that are provided by the Mercer Vet Clinic for the Pets of the Homeless through our home page at: <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/clubs/mercerc>.

Mercer Veterinary Clinic and the crew of the Holiday Pet Baskets wish to thank all the contributors for our programs and we also wish everyone a wonderful and happy holiday season.

For any questions regarding the Mercer Holiday Pet Baskets please contact: **Eileen M. Samitz**, Coordinator of the Mercer Clinic Holiday Pet Baskets at [emsamitz@ucdavis.edu](mailto:emsamitz@ucdavis.edu).